

Baldwin addresses tax cuts, health care

By Alex Balistreri

It was not the scene one would expect for a representative from Washington-no Secret Service, no red carpet-just U.S. Rep. Tammy Baldwin, D-Madison, in a T-shirt, mingling with her ordinary constituents face-to-face at Memorial Union Wednesday afternoon.

"She's known on campus for actively engaging students in the political process," said Liz Sanger, vice chair of College Democrats at UW-Madison.

Baldwin is a graduate of UW-Madison herself and said she is well rooted in this campus. She said her earliest memories include demonstrating with her mother against the Vietnam War.

Baldwin is spending her spring break from Congress in southern Wisconsin to speak with constituents about their concerns with the Bush administration, which Baldwin said include wage stagnation, rising health care premiums and foreign policy.

She contrasted this with what she said were the priorities of the Bush administration: Mars, steroids and tax cuts.

"The concerns of the people I represent are at a complete disconnect from the priorities of the White House," Baldwin said. "The cost has been a failure to lead on the most pressing crises facing our nation."

Baldwin used the popular TV show "The Simple Life" as an example of why tax cuts are misguided.

Paris Hilton, star of the show and heiress to the Hilton fortunes, would receive a tax cut in excess of \$150,000 next year, she said. The average Wisconsin farmer, according to Baldwin, would receive a \$575 tax cut.

Baldwin answered detailed questions from the audience of about 40 regarding her priorities in the House of Representatives-health care and education, among others.

Baldwin said she enjoys working with the most conservative members of Congress on compromise measures to obtain universal health care. One plan in progress is what Baldwin called the "cafeteria plan for states," under which states would be given more leeway to establish unique health care programs.

Still, she said, there is a long way to go before the bipartisan plan would be realized.

Baldwin then took aim at the Bush administration's handling of the Iraq war, saying "Democrats and Republicans alike have characterized this administration as one of the most secretive [administrations]."

Ariane Strombom, coordinator for the Associated Students of Madison's Vote 2004 campaign, said she appreciated Baldwin's visit in light of her reelection efforts this November.

"She's consistently been a positive guiding force for the community and we appreciate how strong she's been and how she's really doing us a service," Strombom said. "She represents all of us here."

Baldwin ended on an optimistic note and compared the current generation of students with the activists of the '60s.

"That generation, through their activism, really changed the direction our country was going. They changed the world," she said. "There is absolutely no reason why your generation couldn't do exactly the same thing. And I would go even further than that—there is every reason you must."
